UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
3 1761 01529950 6

Coleman, Helena
Marching men.

PS
8505
054M3

"MARCHING MEN"

WAR VERSES

BY

HELENA COLEMAN

J. M. DENT & SONS, LTD.
LONDON TORONTO

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/marchingmenwarve00coleuoft

MARCHING MEN

MARCHING MEN

WAR VERSES

By

HELENA COLEMAN

1917
J. M. DENT & SONS LTD.
London - Toronto

PS
8505
054M3

Copyright, Canada, 1917
J. M. Dent & Sons, Limited

LIBRARY
724796
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

To the Memory of

H. H. S.

(First Contingent, C.E.F.)

who Fell in Action, September 18th, 1915,

and of other "Very Gallant Gentlemen,"

who gave their lives for Canada

"To the innermost heart of their own land they are known.
As the stars are known to the night."

CONTENTS.

PAGE

MARCHING MEN 9
Flaring bugle, throbbing drum.

'TIS NOT THE WILL THAT'S WANTED . . . 11
Would God that mine were better luck.

WHEN FIRST HE PUT THE KHAKI ON . . . 13
When first he put the khaki on.

THE RECRUIT 14
Through all the anguish of these days.

THE DAY HE WENT 15
The morning dawned both bright and clear.

ROCKING IN THE BAY 16
From my nook beneath the pine.

CHALLENGE 18
Soldier, be thy blade to-night.

AND THEY WERE YOUNG 20
'Tis when you're young and life ascends.

THE FIELDS ARE GREEN IN CANADA . . . 21
The fields are green in Canada.

OH, NOT WHEN APRIL WAKES THE DAFFODILS . 23
Oh, not when April wakes the daffodils.

CHILDREN OF ENGLAND YET TO BE . . . 24
Children, children, yet unborn.

CONTENTS

PAGE

AUTUMN, 1917 27
We know by many a tender token.

A GREAT WHITE COMPANY 29
A great white company.

PRO PATRIA MORTUI 31
Say not they died for us.

AT NIGHT 32
Between the calling clamors of the day.

TO OUR BELOVED 33
The hearts you knew in those unchallenged years.

LEAVE US OUR TEARS 35
At your strong hands, O gallant men.

CONVOCATION HALL 36
They rose.

IN FRANCE'S FLOWERED FIELDS 37
In France's flowered fields they lie.

COUNTRY OF MINE 39
Country of mine that gave me birth.

MARCHING MEN.

FLARING bugle, throbbing drum,
Onward, onward hear them come,
Like a tide along the street
Swells the sound of martial feet;
On the breeze their colors streaming,
In the sun their rifles gleaming,
Pride of country, pride of race,
Glowing in each ruddy face—
Marching men, marching men,
Leaping pulses keep you pace.

Measured, rhythmic, thousands strong,
Sounds their tread the whole night long,
Beating over heart and brain,
Over hopes that bloomed in vain,
Like the roll of distant thunder,
That would tear a world asunder,
All the nation's hope and pride
Surging in the tireless tide—
Marching men, marching men,
Love goes praying by your side.

Deep the pathways they have worn
Over women's hearts forlorn,

Over lives grown thin and failing,
Where the stars of hope are paling;
Children's arms they must unbind,
Love and laughter leave behind,
Turn them from the beckoning morrow,
And the praying hands of sorrow,
Turn them to a place of dread
Where the skies burn darkly red,—
Marching men, marching men,
Grief shall follow in your tread.

From the silver coasts outlying,
Where the pallid ships are plying,
Sweeping in from East and West,
Over crag and mountain crest,
Up from desert, grove and glen,
Still there come those hosts of men;
In their hands the sword aflame,
On their lips an ancient name,
Cleaving hearts and lives asunder,
Trampling thrones and empires under;
Temples lately love-forsaken
They have entered and retaken,
Earth itself their tread has shaken—
Marching men, marching men,
Sleeping gods your shouts awaken!

'TIS NOT THE WILL THAT'S WANTED.

WOULD God that mine were better luck
Than falls to the lot of woman,
In these great days with the world ablaze
And Britain's face to the foeman;
In these great days when the hour has struck
Calling for every ounce of pluck—
God help me not to curse my luck
That I was born a woman!

Oh, for the stinging lash of the spray,
Green waves and wild commotion,
The lowering fogs where grim sea-dogs
Stalk ever the Northern ocean;
Watching by night, watching by day,
Ribbons of smoke in the offing grey,
Holding the Hun and his hordes at bay
Far in the wild North ocean!

Oh, for the airman's sinuous flight,
The great wings climbing, curving,
To desperate deeds as earth recedes
One's tightened pulses nerving,

Over the hostile camps at night,
Where red eyes gleam through the murky light,
A blow to strike for freedom's right
The God of freedom serving!

Or out on the tortured fields of France
Where hellish deeds are flaunted,
With face to the Rhine on the firing line
To stand with a heart undaunted;
'Mid screaming shell and shrapnel dance
Unmoved by outer circumstance,
To serve one's turn and take one's chance—
'Tis not the will that's wanted!

WHEN FIRST HE PUT THE KHAKI ON.

WHEN first he put the khaki on
He tried with careful art
To seem blasé and casual
And play the proper part,
But it was plain as plain could be
He was a child at heart.

Although he talked in knowing terms
Of what "the boys" had done,
Likewise of ammunition tests,
And how to load a gun,
And bragged that in his stocking feet
He stood full six foot, one.

Yet all the while the child looked out
With mild appealing eyes,
Unconscious he was visible
Beneath the man's disguise,
Nor dreaming what the look evoked
In hearts grown mother-wise.

How could he know the sudden pang,
The stir of swift alarms,
The yearning prayer that innocence
Be kept from all that harms,
The inner reach of tenderness,
And cradling of soft arms?

THE RECRUIT.

THROUGH all the anguish of these days,
The haunting horror and the woe,
One thought can set my heart ablaze
My memory aglow.

It is his look just as he turned
After the last good-byes were said,
A look as though for him there burned
Some beacon-light ahead.

As though beyond the farthest thought
Of this dark world's horizon rim,
Some star of faith by us uncaught
Swung into range for him.

As though his spirit, winged, had flown
Past stormy seas on some far quest,
And like a bird had found its own
Hid in a quiet nest.

THE DAY HE WENT.

THE morning dawned both bright and clear,
That unforgotten day he went,
The hills were blue and very near
As if for their encouragement.

The rose that was her special care,
Had come to color over night,
And lifted to the radiant air
A bud half-blown—a lovely sight.

He paused a moment by its side,
Their mingling glances on it fell,
Then his roamed where the hills divide,
Taking of them a mute farewell.

He swept the horizon half around,
Standing erect with kindling eye
That rested where the slope pine-crowned
Went climbing up to meet the sky.

And then to her—with one deep look
That knit her spirit to his own,
Courage and strength of him she took,
And heart to face the road alone.

No word was said; the years behind
Held no regret; and each to each
Gave pledge of what their souls divined
Better in silence than in speech.

ROCKING IN THE BAY.

FROM my nook beneath the pine
I can see the graceful line
Of the little brown canoe in the bay;
Bright and windy is the weather,
But there's no one to untether
And go speeding to the open far away
Where the ragged clouds are flying,
And the sunset gold is dying,—
Empty, listless, she is lying,
Idly rocking, idly rocking
In the bay.

How she'd leap to answer him
When he took the paddle slim
And they'd race as laughing victors to the fray!
They would climb the waves together,
Riding buoyant as a feather—
Or a bird that slants a wet wing to the spray;
But the echoing laughter dies,
Lone and far the seagull cries,
And the little playmate lies
Idly rocking, idly rocking
In the bay.

Son o' mine, O little son,
Has the race indeed been run—
  Have the storm-clouds turned the blue and
    gold to grey?
God be praised who gave you grace,
Strength of heart and will to face
  Wilder winds upon the death-fields far away;
God be praised for lads like you,
And for hearts that measure true,
Though we turn our brimming eyes
To your little brown canoe
By the reedy shore that lies
All the empty summer through
Idly rocking, idly rocking
  In the bay.

CHALLENGE.

SOLDIER, be thy blade to-night
Keen and hungry, ruthless, bright;
Be thy strong right arm unsparing,
Swift to do thy spirit's daring;
Let the God within thee waken,
Lead thee onward to thy height,
Let no citadel be taken
In thy hidden self to-night,
But with soul resolved, unshaken,
Trust the larger faith and fight!

Heir art thou of all the past;
Let its judgments bind thee fast.
Let the ages speak again
Through the hearts of living men;
Never was such passion laid
On our shrinking flesh as now,
Never such a price was paid
For the fealty men avow;
Soldier, this my prayer to-night,
That thy fathers serve thee well,
That their blood and valor tell,
And thy living sword a-light
Charge the very gates of Hell—
For the God of ages fight!

Soldier, if in this night's reaping
Thou be of the harvest found,
Should death take thee into keeping,
Sharer of the soulless ground,
Yet stand fast with sword uplifted,
Wheat from chaff is surely sifted;
Though thou leave all earth behind thee
Never fear but love will find thee;
Lies the issue on the altar,
Ours to dare and never falter.

Soldier, far from thee I stand,
Yet I take thee by the hand,
Doff this woman's robe of weakness,
This inheritance of meekness,
Bid thee harden to the strife,
In the hour supreme of life,
Praying with my heart aflame
As I face the stars to-night;
Worthy be thou of thy name,
Deadly be thy sword and bright,—
Heaven send thee will to fight!

AND THEY WERE YOUNG.

'TIS when you're young and life ascends
That joy waits where the white road bends,
And every face you meet is a friend's.

'Tis when you're young that dreams come true,
And never a cloud but the sun shines through,
When life holds out both hands to you.

For youth it is that rainbows gleam
With showers of gold in every beam—
At either end a pot o' dream.

Ever for youth the roads run straight,
And out beside the wishing-gate
Fairies and blindfold fortune wait.

For youth the jealous roses keep
Their red hearts closed in reticence deep—
The lilies wait in folded sleep.

And oh, for youth each bush with God
Is still afire, and every sod
Bears imprint where His foot has trod.

And they were young who lie so still
Far on that sodden Flanders hill.

THE FIELDS ARE GREEN IN CANADA.

THE fields are green in Canada,
And bloom is on the bough,
The orchards by the farmhouse
Are just a glory now;
The thorn-trees by the fences,
The lilacs by the door
Seem more intent on blooming than
They ever did before.

But there are eyes in Canada
That cannot see for tears,
And there are hearts in Canada
Grown weary with their fears,
The nesting-birds of Canada,
They pipe to deafened ears.

The April woods of Canada
Harbour the sweetest things—
A flash of lilting rapture
Mere recollection brings;
Hepaticas and violets
And all the fairy train
Run out in rosy pathways to
Subdue the world again.

But who is there in Canada
Has any mind to-day
To roam the woods of Canada
Or count the flowers of May,
When Sorrow walks in Canada
And Grief has mind to stay?

Yet is there bloom in Canada
With scent of other life
Plucked from the fields of burning,
Snatched from the hands of strife;
And they who won it, silenced
Just at the turn of dawn,
Their names shall long remembered be
When ours are dimmed and gone.

They made a song for Canada
Shall ring the world around,
Though hearts may grieve, yet Canada
Forever more is crowned,
And these green fields of Canada
Henceforth are sacred ground.

OH, NOT WHEN APRIL WAKES THE DAFFODILS.

OH, not when April wakes the daffodils,
And bob-o-links o'er misty meadows ring
Their fluted bells, and orchards fleeced with Spring,
Go climbing up to crown the radiant hills;
Not when the budding balm-o'-gilead spills
Its spices on the air, and lilacs bring
Old dreams to mind, and every living thing
The brimming cup with fresh enchantment fills.

Oh, bring not then the dread report of death,—
Of eyes to loveliness forever sealed,
Of youth that perished as a passing breath,
Of hearts laid waste and agonies untold,
When here in every sweet Canadian field
Are heaped such treasuries of green and gold!

CHILDREN OF ENGLAND YET TO BE.

CHILDREN, children, yet unborn,
Hold your lives in holy trust,
Yours the blossom, theirs the thorn,
Yours the sweetness, theirs the dust;
That your eyes might see the light,
That love fold you safe and warm,
Fared they to a dawnless night,
Bowed they to a bitter storm. . . .

I can see you at your play
In the dewy fields of morn,
Dancing through the scented hay,
And the sheaves of yellow corn;
There are roses on your cheek,
There is laughter in your eyes
As you romp at hide-and-seek
Where the lark and throstle rise
With your merry ways and wise,
Little children yet unborn.

Out across the drifted sands
With your friends, the fairy-folk,
I can see you linking hands—
Ring-a-rosy round the oak.
Where the lark his rapture tells,
Swinging up into the blue,
Merrily you ring the bells
Of the fox-glove tall as you,
Housed with peace among the flowers
In the haunts that once we knew.
In far happier times than ours,
With no thought of battle-smoke,
Or of British hearts that broke.

Out beyond the shimmering waves
Of your blue, encircling sea,
Lie in nameless, foreign graves
They who kept your England free.
When you watch the wheeling stars
On soft, Summer-scented nights,
With no memory that mars,
Only English sounds and sights,
(Only infinite delights!),
Pray that every British heart
In the years that are to be,
Play the honest British part,

Holding life more reverently
For the sacred lives they gave,
And the deathless liberty
They are dying now to save.

Little children, yet unborn,
Take your lives in holy trust,
Yours the roses, theirs the thorn,
Yours the sweetness, theirs the dust,
That love keep you safe and warm,
Bowed they to a bitter storm.

AUTUMN, 1917.

WE know by many a tender token
When Indian-Summer days have come,
By rustling leaves in branches oaken
And by the cricket's sleepy hum.

By aspen leaves no longer shaken,
And by the river's silvered thread,
The oriole's swinging cup forsaken,
Emptied of music overhead.

By long slant lines on field and fallow,
By mellowing portals of the wood,
By silences that seem to hallow
And invite to solitude. . . .

Are there young hearts in France recalling
These dream-filled, blue Canadian days,
When gold and scarlet flames are falling
From beech and maple set ablaze?

Pluck they again the pale, wild aster,
The bending plume of golden-rod?
And do their exiled hearts beat faster
Roaming in thought their native sod?

Dream they of Canada crowned and golden,
  Flushed with her Autumn diadem?
In years to come when time is olden,
  Canada's dream shall be of them—

Shall be of them who gave for others
  The ardour of their radiant years;—
Your name in Canada's heart, my brothers,
  Shall be remembered long with tears!

We give you vision back for vision,
  Forgetting not the price you paid,
O bearers of the world's decision,
  On whom the nations' debt was laid.

No heart can view these highways glowing
  With gold transmuted from the clod,
But crowns your glorious manhood, knowing
  You gave us back our faith in God.

A GREAT WHITE COMPANY.

A GREAT white company—
By Calvary's way they trod,
A great white company
Marching up to God.

Across the Vale of Many Tears,
Beyond the Hill of Pain they swept,
Their way was soft with fallen tears
Where widowed maid and mother wept.

And some were but as children are,
Still warm where mothering hands had pressed,
So young they had not travelled far
Beyond the hollow of the nest.

And some were tried and valorous men
Whose eyes had seen the hidden sin,
The whitened bones beside the den,
The fierce eye gleaming red within.

And some were singing as they went,
Full, clarion-clear their voices rang,
With Youth still in their hearts unspent
In wistful happiness they sang.

And all had plucked the deathless flower
That blows not in the fields of Time,
Had looked beyond the aging hour—
The dimming marge of mortal clime.

A great white company—
With faith their feet were shod,
A great white company
Marching up to God.

PRO PATRIA MORTUI.

SAY not they died for us;
Say, rather, with their hearts aflame,
They faced the sceptred shame,
Not counting for themselves the cost,
Well knowing else, a world were lost.
For this they came;
For this they died;
For this their death is justified.

Say not they die;
Say, rather, with youth's larger trust,
Into the featureless, far unknown,
Challenging love's integrity,
They spring from earth's recoiling dust.
Could greater be?
Can love disown?
Can truth be overthrown?

Say not for us they died ;
They touched that dimly-visioned height
The ever-enlarging soul of man
Has yet to climb; their feet outran
The world's slow gait; their spirits range
In circling flight
The unconjectured fields of light.
For this they suffered change;
For this they died;
For this their death is justified.

AT NIGHT.

BETWEEN the calling clamors of the day—
Those duties and distractions that implore
A woman's heart — the children's soft uproar,
Mercifully unconscious at their play—
And mine own armèd will, I keep at bay
The haunting fear that waits beside my door,
The furtive ghost that must forever more
Companion me upon the narrowing way;

But with the night—the night that used to be
Filled with such deep serenities of space—
Dim shapes of terror stretch their hands to me,
And dread forebodings lurk in every place;
I shrink from even the starlight lest I see
In its pale gleam a silent, upturned face.

TO OUR BELOVED.

THE hearts you knew in those unchallenged years,
The hearts that loved you—softer grown with tears,
O let them be your living bed,
Come home to us, beloved dead!

We will not mourn or praise you over much,
We only ask with wistful lips to touch
Your garment's hem, and lay sweet boughs
Grown of heart's pride upon your brows.

We only ask that with you we may die
To all that you have died to, putting by
The aims that once set life ablaze,
The cares that vexed those restless days.

For something of us perished at your side,
The lighter self you knew died when you died;
Though we are called by no new name,
We, too, have passed that cleansing flame,—

Have passed beyond the old desires and fears
Into a tenderness unstained of tears;
'Tis this that we would fold you in,
Our spirits' next and nearest kin.

Think not, Beloved, that you have suffered change
To us, it is the world that has grown strange;
We are more wholly yours, indeed,
As the swift tides of earth recede;

For though condemned to life, yet do we stand
Consciously near the Undiscovered Land,
Feeling befriended there and known
In the high fellowship death has shown.

LEAVE US OUR TEARS.

AT your strong hands, O gallant men,
Out of the crucible of strife,
We who once gave, receive again
The sacrament of life.

Lightly we gave amid our joys
That rosed the gift to richer gain,
But you, O lion-hearted boys,
Give out of mortal pain!

Yea, life indeed we take from you,
Continuance of this mortal part,
But not what once as life we knew—
Never the old ease of heart.

Smiling, you faced your fearful task,
But we, remembering, smile no more;
Not even you may of us ask
That we be as before.

Leave us our tears, love's heritage,
Cloud-mists that blur your captured height;
Leave us our griefs, the lamp of age,
The altar-flame of night.

CONVOCATION HALL,

May 18th, 1917.

THEY rose,
The honored and the grave,
The reverend, the grey,
While one read out the names of those
Who, gallant, young and brave,
Upon the field of battle gave
Their ardent lives away.

They rose to honor Youth—
What honor could they give?
What tribute shall we lay
Who still in safety live?
Before the shrine of those who pay
The price of honor and of truth
Giving their lives away?

They rose in reverence, yea;
But those who lie
Far on the Flanders field to-day
Had not an answering word to say;
Their silence thundered their reply—
They gave their lives away!

IN FRANCE'S FLOWERED FIELDS.

IN France's flowered fields they lie,
And she will hold them close and dear,
Above their graves her trees will sigh,
Her grasses cover them year by year.

On Summer noons the sun will stream
In cheerful warmth across their beds,
By night the moon's slant, filmy beam
Build aureoles about their heads.

The fitful winds will make them moan
In soft and plaintive melodies,
And they shall lie apart, alone,
Through all the coming centuries;

Dwelling in silences so vast
No thought to that high tower may climb;
An austere beauty holds them fast
Beyond the boundaries of time.

They were to us mere laughing boys,
But in the passing of a breath
They turned from life's scarce-tasted joys
To this high majesty of death. . .

O France, when coming springs shall break
In foam of bloom to hide thy scars,
And flowers of human kindness make
An end of agonies and wars;

Forget not these our sons who came
At that first wild, bewildered cry
With their young British hearts aflame
Upon thy tragic hills to die.

Still have them in thy guarding care,
A holy and a cherished trust;
And let thy children come with prayer
To dream awhile beside their dust;—

To dream of tender love and ruth,
And give a passing thought to these
Who trod the star-lit ways of truth,
Bondsmen of British loyalties.

And since upon thy heart lies now
The richest ransom ever paid—
White roses torn from England's brow
Beside thy broken lilies laid—

Be thou our friend forever more,
In ties of common anguish bound,
That we may know the sons we bore
Lie not in unregarded ground.

COUNTRY OF MINE.

COUNTRY of mine that gave me birth,
Land of the maple and the pine,
What richer gift has this round earth
Than these fair fruitful fields of thine?
Like sheets of gold thy harvests run
Glowing beneath the August sun;
Thy white peaks soar,
Thy cataracts roar,
Thy forests stretch from shore to shore;
Untamed thy Northern prairies lie
Under an open, boundless sky;
Yet one thing more our hearts implore—
That greatness may not pass thee by!

Thy sons have proved them of the breed
Their gallant British fathers were.
They sprang to arms at Britain's need,
Young lions truly bred of her;
Their faces glowed with inner light,
As rank by rank they swept from sight;
With hearts aflame
They stemmed the shame,
And met the hordes that ruthless came;

Dying, they whispered still thy name—
O Canada, wilt thou deny
The prayer of these who dared to die,
And let true greatness pass thee by?

"Prosperity, prosperity"!—
'Twas not for this they took the sword,
The ensign of thy destiny
Unfurled for them a deeper word;
In tears and blood they paid the price,
And thou art pledged in sacrifice;
Oh, not in vain
The loss, the pain,
If thou dost mourn thy mighty slain
In hearts forsworn of greed and gain,
In hearts that bowed and broken cry
For light and guidance from on high,
That greatness may not pass us by!

PS
8505
054M3

Coleman, Helena
Marching men

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY